Synopsis of the Exhibit

Lemberg: Cosmopolitan Crownland Capital of the Austrian Empire

The purpose of this exhibit is to present the postal history of the Austrian Empire during the 150-year period of its greatest expansion using material that came from, went to, or passed through one of its crownland (provincial) capitals – Lemberg.

Lemberg turns out to be an ideal city through which to study the development of the Austrian postal system. By 1910 and the last census before World War I, Lemberg was the Austro-Hungarian Empire's fifth largest city, having grown very rapidly through the second half of the 19th century. So, enough material is obtainable to exhibit many fine examples of all the available postal services as well as many unusual postal mailings. On the other hand, assembling the items is still much more of a challenge than the Empire's "Big Three" cities (Vienna, Budapest, Prague) or its major port of Trieste, all of which preserve an overabundance of postal history materials.

Background

The Austrian Habsburg rulers acquired Lemberg in 1772, just at the time their empire's postal system was being reorganized and expanded. It was during the subsequent century and a half (1772 to 1918) that the Habsburgs instituted a well-run postal system that helped bind together the many lands and peoples of their multi-ethnic empire. This exhibit, then, deals with the unique Austrian "imprint" on the city's postal history, and also covers the immediate aftermath of the empire's dissolution.

Examining the postal history of Lemberg reveals not only the many innovations introduced throughout the Empire, but also some services specific to this city, e.g., the use of court delivery stamps. In assembling this exhibit, the materials fell out quite naturally into the five groupings presented on the title page. A further breakdown into a more structured outline has been deliberately avoided since this is an organic exhibit that continues to evolve.

Each of the five sections is subtly assigned a color code on the title page. This color is carried on in the title at the top of each section page. Viewers claim to like this color-coding since it helps them to keep track of where they are – both sequentially and chronologically – when making their way through the display.

This exhibit has won nine national-level golds (7 US, 1 Canadian, 1 Ukrainian) along with numerous special awards – most of these with just six frames of material. I am now seeking to win a national Grand Award and to eventually exhibit at the international level. To that end I have spent the past several years expanding the exhibit to eight frames by obtaining the finest Lemberg-related postal history materials from sources around the world. Additionally, I have revised the text on a number of pages to clarify the exhibit's emphasis on the evolution of postal rates. Most recently, at Balpex 2010, this exhibit won a gold, won the Postal History Society's Grand Award, and was one of the finalists for the overall Grand Award.

Sources and Research

Belesky presents a useful overview of the postal history of Lemberg and particularly its pre-stamp postmarks. Also helpful for identifying the early postmarks are works by Adamczyk and Bartke, Mueller, and Steinbach. As one might expect, the older the materials the harder they are to: 1) locate and 2) obtain in satisfactory condition. Tracking down postal markings from the initial decades of Austrian rule presents the greatest challenge, but I have been able to acquire virtually all of these early markings.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Austria used a fairly complex tariff system based on distance (number of postal stations) and weight. There were also reduced rates for local delivery as well as added delivery fees if letters were not held at post offices, but were instead delivered directly to the addressee. Rates for foreign mails could get quite intricate, as at least two monetary systems would be involved. All these considerations necessitated fairly extensive study as well as consultation with other Austria collectors when it came to deciphering some of the arcane tariff combinations exhibited on certain covers.

For any study of Austrian postal history following the introduction of postage stamps in 1850, the preeminent reference is Ferchenbauer. This magnificent reference (now in four volumes) may be unmatched by any other philatelic sourcebook in size (ca. 2,800 pages), beauty, and usefulness. The information included covers not only stamps, but also every conceivable form of postal stationery, local mails, and complete descriptions of rates. Nonetheless, various additional articles and publications proved useful and are listed in the Bibliography.

Highlights

Items in each section of the exhibit that are of exceptional importance are signposted with red borders; red text occasionally emphasizes important aspects of additional items.

The overall exhibit highlight may be the one frame worth of airmail material (corresponding roughly to frame 7) from the world's first regular airmail service that functioned between Vienna and Lemberg. On its own, this material would likely win a gold at an international competition. Almost every item in this section could be highlighted with red borders. Included are six first flight covers of one type or another, a newly recognized second flight registered cover, two last flight items, three to cities outside of the normal air routes, four exceptionally overweight items (including the heaviest packet mailed on the air service during its existence), and two covers flown internationally between Vienna and Kyiv. Many of these items are illustrated in my recent *Congress Book* articles (see Bibliography).

That is not to say that there are not a lot of extraordinary materials in the other parts of this exhibit. The 'Pre-Stamp' period kicks off with a 1772 document signed by Empress Maria Theresia (see copy of Title Page). This is followed by various types of double-headed eagle markers introduced by the Austrians, as well as a myriad of distinctive subsequent town and date markings – many of which are not easy to locate.

Covers with highly unusual frankings, cancellations, or destinations are highlighted in the next sections dealing with the 'Austrian' and 'Austro-Hungarian Monarchies'. Particularly well represented are covers from Austria's very first stamp issue. Also featured are court delivery stamps used on document. These special stamps were only used by the Crownland Court in Lemberg and in surrounding environs to indicate delivery of legal documents.

Many exceptional covers are presented in the 'Great War' section. Included are mailings from the period of Russian occupation of the city, a variety of special military markings, one of only two described "Graycoat" Division postcards, and items from the first airmail service mentioned above.

The exhibit concludes with the 'Flame of Nationalism' section that features seldom-seen materials from the short-lived Western Ukrainian National Republic, which initially had its capital in Lemberg. The city was redesignated as Lviv and was the printing site for Western Ukraine's first stamps. A nine-month Polish-Ukrainian struggle ended with the Poles capturing Western Ukraine and renaming the capital Lwow.

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